DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 240 CS 001 012

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TITLE Accountability--Is "Competitive Partnership" the Answer?
PUB DATE May 74
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (19th, New Orleans, May 1-4, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Disadvantaged Youth; *Educational Accountability; Elementary Grades; *Performance Contracts; Reading Development; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Programs; Slow Learners
IDENTIFIERS *Competitive Partnership; Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I; ESEA Title I

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a new approach to quality education and accountability in personnel performance and pupil progress in reading which has been initiated in the Title I elementary schools of the District of Columbia. This concept, known as competitive partnership, is an instructional program in which major publishing companies compete with each other, but in partnership with a school system, in tackling a specific educational problem. The rationale for instituting competitive partnership was based on the following educational and administrative principles: (1) highly structured reading and mathematics programs are essential to successful performance and progress with slow learners and/or educationally disadvantaged students who represent the Title I target population; (2) performance contracting has demonstrated that it has not produced satisfactory results; (3) under competitive partnership, no more money, and in some cases less money, is being spent for services that relate to a specific task; (4) many teachers need additional support programs and inservice training to successfully perform in urban schools; and (5) each company and teacher is competing with other companies and teachers to produce the desired results. (Author/WR)

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ACCOUNTABILITY - IS "COMPETITIVE PARTNERSHIP" THE ANSWER?

Convention Session: Accountability In Reading

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Accountability is one of those emotion-laden, controversial words that stimulates people to take sides on its pros and cons and its advantages and disadvantages. For administrators and beneficiaries of Title I, however, it is not a question of whether the administration will be accountable, but how and to what end. To borrow Elliot Richardson's pun on the subject of accountability, ... "There is more than one way to Skinner a cat".

The central question, however, is: "How can accountability -- the effective performance by all educational personnel -- be best realized?" An analysis of the provocative problem raises a few related questions. Does accountability come as the result of the adoption of sound and progressive educational policies by a Board of Education? Is accountability secured through the development of a comprehensive, effective, and affective philosophy of education? Is accountability realized through the implementation of a superintendent or other administrators' long and short range goals? Is accountability measured by the classroom teacher's creative approaches and skillful instructional techniques? Is accountability evaluated by the amount and quality of supervision in evidence? Is accountability insured by the utilization of carefully selected materials, obtained from reputable publishing companies? Is accountability acquired through the employment of a single educational publisher who projects a high level of achievement? Is accountability achieved through close home and school relationships in the teaching-learning process?

All of these factors contribute to the changed behavior and positive growth of the learner which is, of course, the end result of accountability. Yes, each group of participants and each component must share in the assumption of responsibility for quality and quantity of input and the resulting output - a learner who has hopefully achieved the established objectives. The most effective

monitoring and determination of the varied contributions, however, cannot be accomplished by isolated efforts, but in concert or in "partnership."

This partnership should be a coordinated systems approach. It should be a partnership that is challenging; a partnership that is stimulating and motivating; a partnership that is dynamic; and a partnership that is continuously demanding excellence from all of its participants. In short, it should be a "Competitive Partnership," a new concept in education which was envisioned and instituted during the school year of 1972-73 in the Title I schools of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia by Dr. James T. Guines, Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services.

The concept must now be examined -- its precise definition, its ingredients, its operations, and the outcomes of its implementation. Dr. Guines, in his monograph on "Competitive Partnership" states that, "Essentially competitive partnership involves major educational publishers competing with each other, but in partnership (1) with a school system, in simultaneously tackling specific educational problems".

In Washington, D. C., competitive partnership was instituted in Grades K-3, and it is now in its second year. Although the competition is basically involved with the publishing companies, the elements of the project stimulate competition, combined with cooperation among the school personnel - administrators, teachers, and coordinators. At the same time, students are motivated to put forth their best efforts. Parents are enthusiastically involved -- teaching and learning.

As was alluded to earlier, competitive partnership is a coordinated systems approach. There are five elements to the project. They are:

(1) Guines, James T., Competitive Partnership, The Next Decade in Urban Education, D. C. Heath Company, Canada and U. S.

- Assessment of student performance.
- Establishment of clearly defined objectives stated in behavioral terms.
- Selection of materials correlated to the objective.
- Implementation of competitive partnership and planned variation.
- Evaluation of results. (2)

Assessment, the first element in the plan, consists of a thorough study and evaluation of the learners' common needs; their interests, potentials, and related environmental factors. This assessment is made through an analysis of standardized achievement tests, teacher judgement, anecdotal records, the cooperative efforts of administrators, research assistants, classroom teachers, psychologists and parents. The stage is now set to develop objectives from a behavioral standpoint or performance expectancy.

The behavioral objectives should, of course, be developed according to specifications as determined by the student assessment, and in accordance with the prevailing course of study. These objectives are a guide, and they give to all concerned a clear picture of what is expected in the way of student performance.

Now a very crucial and important element presents itself, that is the selection of materials and procedures to accomplish the specified tasks. So often, the proposed solution to a problem does not have within it the most suitable and direct means of dealing with a given condition. All reading

(2) Guines, James T., Competitive Partnership, The Next Decade in Urban Education, D. C. Heath Company, Canada and U. S. p. 2

programs are not designed for use with all children in all educational settings. Some children need a highly structured program with provisions for creativity and self expression. Some children need a guided exploratory program; and still others will achieve with any program, worthy of being called a program.

Considering all of the teaching - learning elements, varied programs should be carefully critiqued by a team of professionals. Then those publishing companies which seem to offer the program content, methodology, and services which best serve the client, should be further screened, and a specified number selected as in the case of our Washington, D. C. Title I schools where three (3) were chosen. All three programs meet specifications, but they are all different. The variation is planned for comparative and competitive purposes. The competition among publishers spills over into staff and student competition.

The competitive partners must not only present their wares, but should also be required to study the system's conditions, priorities, and behavioral objectives. When the comprehensive contractual agreements are reached, they should include all aspects of program implementation - continuous staff development, consultant services, monitoring parental involvement, as well as the meat of the program - the curriculum materials. When this is consumated, the partnership ensues. Each company now has an obligation and an incentive to produce positive change. Competition is not only planned, but it is a natural development. The publishers are performing, but they are not charged with the entire burden of delivery as in the case of "performance contracts" which have failed and faded. The job must be done in partnership with trained professionals. It then becomes a

challenging, exciting, promising venture. It becomes a partnership - a competitive partnership.

The heart of the concept and the proof of the process is in implementation. The implementation plan is so systematically structured and conducted that accountability becomes a process rather than a goal. With a clear sense of direction with respect to student expectations, methods of procedure, and role clarifications, accountability is directly and indirectly built into competitive partnership. Picture each company training the staff to thoroughly understand its program rationale, design, components, and instructional techniques. Visualize resource teachers monitoring the programs in the various buildings and cooperative counter monitoring being conducted by coordinators who are accountable to an instructional director; and so on up and down the line. Can the question of accountability become an issue, when it is as automatic as a modern electrical appliance?

Add to this plan of action a corps of parents who are trained and involved by the publishers and the school personnel. As parents learn what their children are learning, reading becomes a "family affair," and parents are as helpful and as comfortable in a classroom as any paraprofessional tutor.

In-service training is also a continuous and on-going process. Monthly and quarterly workshops, seminars, training sessions, and coordinating meetings are held. Consultant services are scheduled, but they may also be secured on an "on-call" basis. School personnel supplement this in-service program with in-house staff development correlated with that of the publishing companies.

No group in the arrangement escapes involvement. The Board of Education and central office personnel are committed to completing and fulfilling contractual arrangements - financial as well as educational, meeting time lines as well as following performance guidelines. The publishing companies take pride in their work and each is striving to reach the set goal. The teachers know where they plan to go, the materials with which they have to work, and the specific methods of working with the special programs. Children are happily working with materials and methods "custom made" for them, so to speak. The participants want to be accountable; they want a share or a piece of the action. Continuous program evaluation is in progress. Review and remedial procedures are conducted as needed, and modifications are made in accordance with existing circumstances.

So much for the determination of needs, setting of goals, selection of materials and program implementation. What about the results? Well, this is where accountability really pays off - where people begin to feel good about themselves, where children are living, learning, and achieving. There can be no mistake about the results. The students are pre-tested by a standardized test - the same test is administered to all children, regardless of the program they will work in. Teachers are carefully profiling and analyzing results. The diagnostic-prescriptive approach, with all of its ramifications of implementation, is followed. Then at the end of the school-year, another form of the same test is administered. The Department of Research and Evaluation scientifically analyzes the results. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators, as well as publishers, are all anxiously awaiting the outcomes. The spirit of friendly competition and a

unified partnership prevails throughout.

Results are not only analyzed, but compared. During the first year of the program, considerable gains were realized. An outside agency is now in the process of comparing results of the three programs. While this task has not yet been completed, each teacher, each parent, and each publisher still has the challenge of reaching even higher levels of achievement during the remaining period of the contract. At the end of three years, the company which has been able to best mobilize its resources and help motivate its partners to produce the greatest gains will be retained to continue program implementation. The standard and the procedures, the motivation, the partnership approach have been set, and the inter-program, as well as intra-program competitive approach has been established. Evaluation is thus built into every program.

Educators, administrators and reading specialists, acknowledge the fact that the concept of accountability has produced a number of negative reactions on the part of educators. However, there is no need to be on the defensive with this understanding because objectives and accountability are necessary if education and its development are to be more than a private personal undertaking. This point of view is quite adequately expressed by Garlie A. Forehand: (3)

(3) Forehand, Garlie A. "Evaluation, Decision-Making and Accountability" Accountability and the Teaching of English, NCTE Commission on English Curriculum 1972

"An educator is under no constraint to admit that a given array of behavioral objectives exhausts his goals. He may have a more elaborate subjective set of goals which motivates his work and still accept a set of behavioral objectives as a reasonable, if not perfect, operational definition of certain of his goals."

Accountability is an attempt, Forehand maintains, rather crude in many of its versions, to establish criteria responsibility. An association of educators can properly object to a particular set of procedures that it considers inimical to effective education, but it should endorse the goal of assuring responsibility to the public interest and should work actively toward developing procedures for attaining this goal. By doing this, educators have an opportunity to play a positive rather than a negative role and to supplant undesirable definitions of accountability with better ones.

The answer, therefore, which must be given to the question with which this paper was introduced: "Accountability: Is Competitive Partnership the Answer? is "yes", provided it is understood that "Reading is only a means to an end - only the tiger's tail" and Competitive Partnership is only one way of Skinnering the educational cat.

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